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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004215

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL KDEM IZ XL

SUBJECT: FALLUJAH: MOBILIZED FOR THE REFERENDUM, BIG
TURNOUT PREDICTED IN ICONIC CITY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT FORD,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Fallujans are mobilized to vote in large numbers October 15. Most residents remain primarily focused on immediate needs in the recovering city (power, water, and security) rather than the national political debate. City leaders have not yet formally urged rejection of the constitution. Tribal leaders have stated that the decision should be left to individuals. Imams, the city's most influential group, likely will urge a "no" vote via informal exchanges during prayer sessions, but not from the city's numerous mosque pulpits. Clerics fear the current draft equals Iraq's division. They still seek and hope for changes. (NOTE: It is unclear what effect the IIP's decision to support the draft will have on Fallujah voters, although initial indications are that it will move a proportion of them to vote in favor of the draft. END NOTE.)

Few constitutions have been distributed in the city; a majority of residents will not have read the draft by referendum day. Fallujah's near universal mobilization, active over several months, has translated into a sizable Sunni-Arab voting bloc in Al Anbar province. The Independent Electoral Commission for Iraqi (IECI) has agreed to allow area tribes, with imam support, to help provide inner security at the city's approximate 30 polling sites. International media (Coalition Force-assisted) are scheduled to be in the city for the referendum; their presence should help capture strategic images of high turnout in a city more known for its notoriety than any democratic impulse. Zarqawi propaganda discouraging political participation has proven to be largely ineffective in Iraq's city of mosques, once his terrorist headquarters. This ironic and telling AMZ failure should be exploited in the days following the October 15 vote. END SUMMARY.

A MOBILIZED CITY

¶2. (C) Fallujah leaders began to mobilize in spring 2005, organizing grass-roots meetings among key city groups. In early June, one session included over 200 participants, who met at a nearby cement factory. A summary document issued at the time contained standard Sunni-Arab complaints (detainee release, CF withdrawal, etc.), but it also urged area residents to participate in the national political process. In mid-July, Fallujah imams issued an oral fatwa urging Fallujans to register for the upcoming referendum and election. Tens of thousands did. Key city groups and ordinary residents have since offered consistent points to Fallujah Poloff and Marine officers echoing that the city will participate in the upcoming referendum and December election. They include imams and tribal sheikhs.

IMAMS: The city's mufti (principal imam authorized to issue fatwas) told Poloff and Marine FAO October 4 that "the city is completely ready for the referendum, but the more important question is whether appropriate changes will be made to the constitution. If there are not, we will reject it. We would like to vote for it, but not in its present form." Another senior imam, Sheikh Ahmed Al Janabi, said September 28 that he had delivered five Friday sermons urging participation, adding that many other imams had as well. Sheikh Ahmed noted that the city's council of imams had not yet decided on a joint position. He, however, would vote "no" because of "dangers" in certain paragraphs, many of which would lead to & a splitting of the country . . . you will have many different parties with no centralized control."

TRIBAL SHEIKHS: The head of Fallujah's tribal council, Sheikh Thamer, noted in an October 8 meeting that Fallujans had been informed about polling locations. He stressed that tribal leaders would not tell tribal members how to vote, declaring "Of course not. A man is free to vote. It's his decision. We are not going to tell anyone how to vote." Other tribal heads have questioned ongoing U.S. military operations in the Euphrates River Valley, which they believe are intentionally designed to suppress Sunni-Arab turnout.

IECI EXCEPTION: FALLUJAH'S DIFFERENT

¶3. (C) IECI Chairman Izadin visited Fallujah October 6 (reported septel) and informed leaders that the commission had agreed to allow Fallujah-area tribes to help protect polling sites. City police would be co-located for inner

core security, while ISF units (Iraqi Army and Public Order Brigades) would provide outer security, shadowing Marine quick-reaction force teams. This approach would help reduce possible friction between the largely Shia dominated ISF and the city's dominant Sunni-Arab population. Fallujah imams had also agreed to help provide IECI workers. (NOTE: Poloff and Marine FAO will meet with local IECI hires Wednesday, October 12, to confirm overall preparations in the city.)

INTIMIDATION?

14. (C) Fallujah leaders have largely discounted pre-referendum threats by extremists and insurgents. The city's broad mobilization, supported publicly by imams and tribal heads, has blunted the terrorist message. Some fliers have appeared on city streets urging residents not to participate in the referendum, but without attribution. Residents do not appear swayed by AMZ warnings and have instead decided to heed calls by their religious and tribal leaders. Fallujans continue, however, to flag ongoing concern about ISF in the city, including their role on referendum day. The presence of Iraqi police in the inner cordon should alleviate most Fallujans, concerns about possible harassment or intimidation by the Shia-dominated Iraqi Army and POB units. (NOTE: In the January 30 election, there were some reports of ISF harassment. ; in recent days, we have heard a POB refrain along the lines of "It's Shia time, Sunni boys.")

STRATEGIC MEDIA MOMENT

15. (C) A delegation of media representatives are scheduled to visit Fallujah referendum day, facilitated by Embassy PAO, MNC-I and U.S. Marines. This group, mostly western, will be based at the downtown Fallujah Civil-Military Operations Center October 14-16. Their presence should help ensure that strategic images of the anticipated tens of thousands of voters are captured October 15. One Fallujah resident, Lawyer Muslih, told Poloff and Marine FAO October 4 that &if you don't take pictures, no one will believe it.⁸ Big turnout in the city should help counter extremist propaganda, including from Zarqawi himself)- Fallujah's most notorious ex-resident. COMMENT

16. (C) COMMENT: Fallujah leaders have echoed each other for many weeks: the city will turnout in large numbers referendum day. Residents are mobilized to an extent not seen in other Anbar cities. The large presence of U.S. Marines and a local tribal security plan, supplemented by police, have helped reassure residents that polling sites will be safe. So far, informal discussions with Fallujah residents point toward &no8 vote, particularly should further changes not be made to the draft constitution. The IIP's decision to support the draft will likely move some in the city toward a positive vote and could signal an important shift in perceptions on the ground. One Fallujan, Engineer Farouk, told Poloff and Marine FAO October 12 that Fallujans would take note of the announcement, although not all people listened to the IIP. Notably, key Fallujah leaders have also begun to look toward the follow-on December election, a sign that their mobilization efforts -- and momentum as a sizable Sunni-Arab voting bloc -- will be carried forward, regardless of the referendum outcome. This is positive and reflects pragmatic thinking. Media images from the strategic city on referendum day will show Fallujah advancing politically, albeit amid still sizable reconstruction and security challenges. High turnout October 15 will be a testament to qualified progress on a key front. END COMMENT.
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